

MODEST MENACE

by Louis Berg

Everybody loves easygoing Alan Ladd. You couldn't be shot by a nicer guy . . .

A CASUAL visitor to the Alan Ladd household would conclude that the screen's most popular menace is principally interested in babies and horses. Mr. Ladd's living room is cluttered with tots and toys — his own kids and others belonging to neighbors; the toys are shared indiscriminately.

Evidence of his interest in horses is all over the place. The walls are hung with prints of race horses, hunting coursers, horse-drawn surreys and phaetons. The handles of his ash trays are equine-shaped. Statuettes of horses, in silver, clay or plastics, occupy every conceivable spot for gewgaws.

Talk about horses to Ladd and his poker face assumes an animation never visible on the screen. When I saw him in Hollywood, on the set of "Whispering Smith," he was distraught over the condition of a foal on his ranch that had injured itself on a barbed-wire fence. Alan Ladd owns dozens of saddle horses and race horses. He is not as big an operator

HOLLYWOOD



COLTS and babies melt this soft-boiled killer's heart

as Crosby or L. B. Mayer, but his interest is more consuming.

He melts also when the discussion has to do with babies. It makes you wonder how they ever came to cast this man as a killer. Blond, sleepy-eyed and soft-spoken, he stares at the floor when the subject of conversation is himself, stumbles over sentences and leaves his thoughts unfinished.

Shadow of Paramount

IN REPOSE his face is sullen. But it lights up easily and attractively when he smiles. He does not often laugh. He has a deep-rooted stomach complaint — the result of living on

doughnuts and coffee when he was trying to break into pictures. His stomach trouble was responsible for his medical discharge from the Army, and also, in all likelihood, for his slightly cynical and occasionally sinister expression.

He himself attributes all his good fortune to his wife, Sue Carol, who discovered him as an actor. Mrs. Ladd handles the ambition end of the business for her husband, and has quite enough for two. Ladd is interested in his career but easygoing about it. Whatever Paramount says is good enough for him, though occasionally he voices the wistful hope that they will let him appear in a picture without flashing a gun.

Before he got the Paramount contract, Ladd had a number of rather miserable jobs — but always in the shadow of the Paramount studio. He was a pick-and-shovel laborer, a hash-slinger, a soda jerk and a movie grip. Also an actor and announcer on a small radio station.

When he was seven he lived across the street from Paramount, and used to steal under the fence in the evening to play cowboy-and-Indian against the background of a Cecil B. de Mille horse-opera set.

Docile Husband

HIS IMMEDIATE reaction when he made good in "This Gun for Hire," and saw himself on the screen for the first time in a big role, was that he would now have to learn how to act. It is comments like this that set his wife's teeth on edge. The only thing about him that Mrs. Ladd cannot control is his modesty. Otherwise he is a remarkably docile husband, deferring to his wife in everything.

If he ever actually lost his temper, he could be dangerous, one feels. He is slight of build but broad of shoulder. In his youth he was a star athlete — track and field, and swimming. He is singularly fast and silent in all his movements; manages to look lazy and indifferent while covering plenty of ground.

Aside from his wife, not many people seem to know him well. He, himself, suggested that Bill Demarest, the movie comedian, might be a good source of information.

"Alan Ladd?" said Bill Demarest. "What do you want to know about him? There's nothing wrong with that boy. I'm writing a book, you know, all about my experiences in vaudeville — the memoirs of an old trouper. He ain't in it."

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